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HAE-THU-SKA SOCIETY OF THE OMAHA TRIBE.

THE societies of an Indian tribe occupy an important place in the social life of the people. They furnish the entertainments of the community, and afford opportunities for personal display and the enjoyment of honors and distinctions. They also provide dramatic pleasures, for in some of their ceremonies a man with histrionic talent can show forth his powers, and win from the spectators their coveted applause. Some societies are closely interwoven with the tribal organization, and in all of them are conserved ancient customs, traditions, and tribal history, and their influence is to promote valorous ambition and foster patriotism, — the love of that which belonged to a common ancestry. These societies maintain in an Indian community a relation somewhat similar to that sustained toward our more elaborate and more highly organized society by the theatre, — social gatherings for music and dancing, and even our more dignified institutions wherein are preserved our national history.

These societies take their root in man's social nature, and have drawn therefrom a strength that has enabled them to transcend some of the most stringent of ancient rules; for within the membership of these societies were gathered persons belonging to different gentes or clans, thus making possible the delight of mingling with other than one's kindred; of meeting the sympathetic response of strangers; of projecting one's self within that real but intangible organism we call society, without danger to one's self, one's relations, or one's friends. Moreover, within this circle of men enlarged beyond the ties of blood, the past history as well as the present life of the people was preserved and dramatized in the ceremonies, so that there was nothing foreign or feigned to impair the homogeneity of the assembly. It is therefore not surprising to find that the hold these societies have upon the Indian defies almost all vicissitudes; for in the face of the steady progress of tribal disintegration which is everywhere going on over the length and breadth of our land; while chiefs are being forced to become private men, and to see their old-time office disappear, and while the warrior must hereafter fight in the uniform of the soldier of the United States; while the tribal lands are rapidly falling apart into individual holdings, and the ancient landmarks are being ploughed under, — these societies linger, eluding the ever-encroaching power of new conditions. Their songs ring in the memory of the people; their tales are told to each new generation; their symbols are preserved, though their import is often lost; and the Indian is hardly to be found who will not feel the thrill of response to the cadences of the spirited dance and the pageants of his forefathers.

The Hae-thu-ska Society of the Omahas probably originated in that tribe, at least as to its present form. So ancient are these people, and during the centuries they have touched and been affected by so many other groups, that it would be unsafe to say that any particular society or any particular custom was exclusively developed and maintained by this or any one tribe. The guesses at the meaning of the name *Hae-thu-ska* are still only guesses, so that little if any clue can thus be gained as to the origin of the society. There is a tradition that it sprang from the Poo-ge'thun Society, and there are indications that seem to lend plausibility to this origin. The points of resemblance as well as the divergence between the two societies suggest a relationship, and may also mark epochs in the development of the tribal organization as it is now known.

It seems to be necessary to say a word concerning the tribal organization of the Omahas. There are in the tribe ten gentes; each one is an organization within itself, having its sub-gentes, and its council or gentile fire. These gentes are in two groups of five, each one occupying one half of the *Hoo-thu-ga*, or tribal circle. In the government of the tribe, there are indications that the oligarchy of seven, which is the ruling power, was once composed of chiefs drawn from the seven gentes, which have a Ne-ne-ba-tan sub-gens, — that is, a subdivision possessing a pipe. In the process of time a change took place: the seven chiefs composing the oligarchy became representative of the seven gentes, and not men actually born within these gentes. Thus the governing power passed from hereditary chiefs to men who through certain acts could achieve such honors as made them eligible to membership in the oligarchy. The change was a democratic revolution, inasmuch as any man, irrespective of the gens in which he was born, could attain by his valor and industry the highest position within the tribe. Under these new conditions the man who arrived at the dignity of a place within the oligarchy must no longer go to war. And although he was looked to as a defender in case of an attack upon the tribe, all his acts must be in the interest of peace and good order. The right to bestow honors upon warriors belonged to a single gens, the Wal-jin-shtae, the Keepers of the Tent of War. In this tent the ceremonies took place which tested the warrior's record, and accorded or denied him the right to claim credit for his deeds; and prescribed his decorations, and gave him permission to publicly wear these as indicative of his valorous acts. The loss of hereditary prerogative to certain gentes and the divorcing of warlike powers from the chieftaincy were steps that could not have been hastily taken, and must have been attended by severe tribal disquietude. It seems not unlikely that traces of this movement can be discerned in the rules and ceremonies of the Poo-ge'thun and Hae-thus-ka societies.

The Poo-ge'-thun membership was confined to chiefs who were admitted upon their war record solely. The Leader was the member who could count the greatest number of valiant deeds; therefore, unless a man continued to add to his warlike exploits, he could hardly hope to retain the office of Leader, the position being one coveted by all ambitious warriors. The Keeper of the Songs held his place for life, and it was the duty of the incumbent to train his successor. These songs were the archives of the society; in them were preserved the names of noted members, and the story of the deed which gave rise to the song was carefully transmitted. The recital of these songs and stories formed an important part of the meetings of the society. There were certain rites which obtained in the Poo-ge'-thun which were survivals of earlier forms of tribal government and ancient prerogative of the chiefs, but the discussion of these does not belong to the present subject.

The Hae-thu-ska Society was also composed of warriors, but its membership included chiefs and privates. The rules were democratic in principle, and were carried out in practice. No special honor belonged to the chief; he was rated as an equal with the other members. No man was eligible to the Hae-thu-ska who had not won, through the ceremonies of the Tent of War, the right to proclaim his warlike deeds. Such a man might be invited to meet with the society, and if no one objected to him he became a member. If a member was unable to attend a meeting of the society he was permitted, if he was a man of good standing, to send his son to represent him, but this attendance did not entitle the young man to membership. No matter how high the honors of a father, these could not be credited to his son: nothing but ceremonially approved deeds of valor could give a man place within the Hae-thu-ska.

The officers comprised a Leader, a Herald, and two Servers of the Feast.

The Leader held his office for life, or until he resigned. When the office became vacant the aspirant to the position made a feast, to which all the members of the society were invited, and, his desire being made known, if there was no objection he by general consent became Leader. Such a man, however, must be one whose successful leadership of war parties had made him noted among the people. His seat was at the back of the lodge, opposite the door.

The society met at irregular intervals, but generally about once a month, and always in the same lodge. Some member honored in the tribe and possessing a commodious dwelling entertained the society, but did not provide the feast except when he specified his desire to do so. The food furnished for each gathering was a voluntary contribution of some member, who obeyed the tribal custom which for-

bids the giver of a feast to partake of it. The seat assigned to the giver of the feast was near the entrance of the lodge, on the right as one enters. When the Leader contributed the food he was obliged to leave his official seat, and occupy the place belonging to the feast-giver. Each member of the society had his appointed place in the circle about the lodge. The singers were grouped around the drum, which was placed on the left hand of the Leader.

The society had its peculiar regalia. The members cut their hair close on each side of the head, and left a tuft a few inches wide, extending from the forehead to back of the crown, where it met the scalp-lock. No clothing was worn except the breech-cloth, and at the back a long bunch of grass was fastened in the belt. Each man painted in accordance with the directions given him when he passed through the ceremonies of receiving his honors at the Tent of War. The Leader, and other men distinguished for their skill and success in war, wore an ornament called *Ka-hae*, or crow. This was made of two sticks like arrow shafts, painted green, and feathered, like the stems of the fellowship pipes, with feathers of the buzzard; tufts of crow plumage and long pendants reaching nearly to the ground, made of crow's feathers, completed this ornament, which was worn at the back fastened to the belt, the two shafts rising to the man's shoulder blades. The men wearing the *Ka-hae*; painted the front of their bodies and their arms and legs with daubs of black; their faces and backs were completely covered with black paint, but on their backs white spots were put on the black color. Comparatively few men attained sufficient eminence as warriors to wear the *Ka-hae* and paint themselves in this manner. The blackened face and dappled limbs and front were emblematic of the thunder clouds and their destructive power as they advance over the heavens, even as the warrior approaches his victim dealing his death-darts. The blackened back with its white spots indicated the dead body of the enemy, which the birds were busy pecking, leaving their droppings as they tore away the fast-decaying flesh. The crow was worn, as it was said to be the first to find a corpse, and later was joined by other birds of prey. The tuft of grass worn by all the members of the Hae-thu-ska bore a twofold signification: it represented the tail of the *Me-ka-thu*, or wolf, the animal closely allied to the warrior, and it also symbolized the scalp of the vanquished enemy.

There are two classes of warlike deeds, which are distinguished in according honors:—

1st. *Nu ah-tah'-the-sha*. Literally the words mean, in the direction of men, signifying that the warrior has gone forth seeking men to fight; one whose warfare has been aggressive, and away from home.

2d. *Wa-oo ah-tah'-the-sha*, or *Tee ah-tah'-the-sha*,—in the direction

of woman, or in the direction of the tent or home; defensive warfare, as when the camp or village has been attacked and valorously defended.

Only men of the first class, those whose aggressive warfare has become noted, and confirmed through the ceremonies of the Tent of War, are eligible to the office of Leader, or permitted to wear the *Ka-hae* and paint in black as already described.

Warriors of the second class thrust an arrow through their scalp-lock, or carried a bow and arrow in their hand. Later, when guns were used, these men streaked their faces and bodies with black, to indicate the grime of the gunpowder on their perspiring bodies in the heat of action.

After the members were gathered the Leader took some box-elder wood and charred it over the fire; with this the body and face were to be painted. While the wood was charring, the following song was sung by all present:—

Nun-g'thae ! thae-tae,
He-tha'-ke-un'-tae ah thun-ah' he dae.

The coal which is here;
I am weary waiting to paint myself with it!

The idea conveyed by the song is not that of literally waiting until one is tired for the wood to char, that the ceremony of painting may take place, but indicates the desire that fills the brave man's breast, even to the taxing of his strength to weariness, for the opportunity to perform feats of daring, to risk his life for valor and for honor, that he may become a bulwark to his kindred, to his tribe, and a terror to their enemies. The music conveys more than the words alone would tell; in its cadences one not only enters into the warrior's eagerness, but is reminded of the strange, portentous stir that fills the air, and affects man and beast, when the mighty storm is seen blackening the horizon. The power and naturalness of this song are noteworthy.

After the ceremony of painting was completed, the Leader took up the pipe belonging to the society, which the giver of the feast had already filled, and scattered some tobacco on the earth; then he lifted the stem of the pipe upward, paused a moment, and slowly pointed it to the north, east, south, and west. During these movements the society sang this prayer:—

Wa-kan-da, tha-ne ga-thae-kae.
Ae-ha tha-ne hin ga *wae-tho-hae tho*

Wakanda (God), I give tobacco (in this pipe).
Wilt thou not smoke the tobacco.

The last four words are musical syllables. The music is a dignified choral. After this prayer and offering the pipe was passed around, each member in his turn taking a whiff, and the opening ceremonies came to an end.

Shortly the singers about the drum struck up one of the songs belonging to the society, a song suitable for dancing, and whoever was so moved rose, and, dropping his robe in his seat, stepped forth nude, except his embroidered breech-cloth, and decoration of grass or feathers. Bells were sometimes worn about the ankles, or bound below the knee, and added a castanet effect, marking the rhythm of the song and dance, and adding to the scene, so full of color, movement, and wild melody. As the members danced they exhibited in a conventionalized pantomime their exploits on the warpath. A variety of steps were taken; the foot was placed strongly and flat upon the ground with a thud; the limbs were lifted at a sharp angle to the body, which bent and rose with sudden and diversified movements. There was not a motion of foot, leg, body, arm, or head that did not follow in strict time the accent of the song. The throb of the drum started the pulses of the spectator, and held him to the rhythm of the scene, as the eye followed the rapid, tense action of the dancer, and the ear caught the melody which revealed the intent of the strange drama.

The intense character of the dance, its violent movements, made it impossible to be sustained for any length of time; the songs and the dances are therefore short. Resting songs followed a dance, during which the dancers sat muffled in their robes, dripping with perspiration, and panting to regain their breath.

All this time the food was cooking over the fire, for little if anything was prepared beforehand, and when the viands were nearly ready the two Servers advanced, and performed a peculiar dance to certain songs which belong to this peculiar ceremonial way of announcing to the company that refreshments were about to be served. The two Servers must be men who have broken the necks of an enemy, either in aggressive or defensive warfare.

It is a custom in the Hae-thu-ska Society to serve the food with two sticks; if these were not provided, then the naked hand must be thrust in the boiling pot to take out the meat. The choice portions were selected and given to the bravest man present. If a dish of dog was among the dainties, the head was presented to one who had broken the neck of an enemy.

After all the members were served, the Leader rose, and in an address of some length, replete with native eloquence, thanked the host of the evening for the feast he had provided. The Leader discoursed upon the vital need of food for the preservation of the race; how it was sought amid trials, dangers, and hardships, so that food

represented both a man's valor and industry, and was the greatest of gifts, since without it no man could live ; and such a gift being provided, no one should partake of it without first thanking the giver, not forgetting to include his wife and his children, who have relinquished to strangers their share in this great necessity of mankind. At the close of this speech each one betakes himself to the food so graciously offered and received.

When all had finished, the man to whom the dog's head was given held up the bone, now destitute of flesh, and recounted the story of his battles. The singers struck up a dance song, and the narrator rose and acted out the story he had just recited. If the warrior possessed dramatic talent, he was not apt to let the opportunity slip of recording a triumph not only for his skill in war, but for his histrionic powers.

On entering the tent all members turned to the left, and passed around the lodge to their respective seats. The same order was preserved in going out : he who sat with the door to his left hand passed out first, and so on round the lodge, every one moving to the left. At the close of the evening, the song of dismissal was sung : —

Ku-tha na-zhe-thae,
Ku-tha ma-the-thae.

Friends, arise,
Friends, walk forth !

All joined in this grand choral, as the members sedately moved out into the night, the last man completing the circle of the tent as the final note was sounded under the stars.

The songs of the Hae-thu-ska merit a paper to themselves, not only because of their remarkable interest musically, but as a study of the beginnings of lyric art. One characteristic, however, belongs to this article.

It was a rule of the Hae-thu-ska that when a member performed a brave deed, the society decided whether the name of the doer and the record of his act should be preserved in song ; without this consent of the society, none would dare allow a song to be composed in his honor. When consent was given to perpetuate a man's record, either he composed the song which was to carry the story of his deed, or some man with musical ability undertook the task ; the song was then quickly learned by the members, and became part of the record of the Hae-thu-ska. These songs preserved for generations the deeds of members, and therefore to a good degree told the story of the tribe itself. It has happened that the name and deed of a man long dead would be dropped from some favorite song and a

modern hero's name substituted. This change, however, could be made only by the consent of the members, and it was seldom that they so agreed; there was a repugnance to the obliterating of a name once famous in the tribe. Still there are a few songs which carry two names and two stories, one being gradually supplanted by the other. By this overlapping of names a clue can be gained as to the age of a song, since no man's name could be dropped while any of his near relatives or descendants were living; the protest would be too strong against such extinction of family fame. It seems safe to conclude that a name could hardly be wiped out within a hundred years of the birth of a song. Some Hae-thu-ska songs date back several generations.

When a song embalming the name and deed of a warrior was sung, at that part of the song where the name was mentioned; the drum was not sounded. The voices bore the strain; the name was therefore distinctly heard, the cessation of the drum arresting the attention of the listener.

In view of the democratic character of the Hae-thu-ska, its touches of ritual and symbolism, its stirring music and dramatic dancing, its social power,—for its members not only had their valiant acts preserved in its archives of song, but were honored by peculiar ceremonies at their death,—it is not surprising that this society should have found favor in other tribes, and have flourished as it has done among the Otoes, Ioways, and Pawnees. Tradition tells of an old and close alliance with the Pawnees, who belong to a distinct linguistic stock from the Omahas. The society among the Pawnees is called the Hae-thu-ska, and seems rooted among these people; they have a large number of songs, and, although Omaha Hae-thu-ska songs are known, they are never sung except as a compliment to some visiting member of that tribe. The Ioways and Otoes are closely related to the Omahas, and until within a century were neighbors. I may add that these tribes were brought for a time by the United States government under one agency about fifty years ago, thus permitting the renewal of familiar intercourse. The Ioways and Otoes have each their own Hae-thu-ska music, and call the society by that name.

The Yanktons, a branch of the Dakota group, were old friends of the Omahas; visits have been exchanged between the tribes for several generations. The Yanktons adopted the Hae-thu-ska, but did not call it by that name; they give it the descriptive title of "The Omaha Dance," or "The Grass Dance," the latter name referring to the tuft of grass worn at the belt. Fifty years or more ago, while the feuds between the Omaha and the Ogallala and Brule Dakotas were at their height, the Hae-thu-ska became known to the latter

tribes and was adopted by them. For years the Omaha songs were sung, but they gradually became modified by stranger tongues, both as to words and cadences. There are, however, at the present time, original Dakota Hae-thu-ska songs, but they are of comparatively recent dates.

It is a little curious that about the same time the Brule and Ogallalla Dakotas were accepting the Hae-thu-ska Society of their enemy the Omahas, the latter were equally delighted with a dance belonging to the Dakotas called the Ma-wa-da-ne, and adopted it with its Dakota songs. The Ma-wa-da-ne reached the Omahas through their near relatives the Poncas, whose lands adjoined the Dakota tribes. The Dakotas until recently called the Poncas Omahas, distinguishing the Omaha tribe by the adjective *real*. The Ma-wa-da-ne songs and dance were quiet rather than stirring, and extolled the man noted for his gifts, rather than his warlike acts. For a time, the Ma-wa-da-ne became very popular, and while the Omahas and Dakotas were killing each other at sight, they were singing each other's songs, one the virile and spirited Hae-thu-ska, the other the decorous and tame Ma-wa-da-ne. Before many years the Hae-thu-ska finally triumphed over its new rival, and has once more become the national dance of the Omahas, so to speak. Meanwhile, through the medium of the Dakotas the Hae-thu-ska, under the name of "The Omaha" or "Grass Dance," spread to other branches of the Sioux and also to the Winnebago Indians; the modified Omaha songs and some of the Dakota music were taken with the dance. Within the past ten years the Winnebagos have composed songs for this dance; these are, however, very unlike the old and genuine Hae-thu-ska music of the Omahas.

I have witnessed this dance among several branches of the Dakotas, as well as the Winnebagos and Omahas, and am familiar with the music of these tribes as well as that of the Pawnee, Ioway, and Otoe Hae-thu-ska songs. Between the Omaha, Ioway, Otoe, and Pawnee songs there seems to be a unity of conception and of purpose; the music carries the story, and belongs to the dramatic dance. The songs of the Dakota and Winnebago do not partake of this character. The society among these tribes has lost its old significance; the decorations have changed, and the meaning of some of the ancient symbols is forgotten; even the dancing does not reproduce the vivid picture of personal hazards in war. There are many signs of transplanting rather than of an indigenous growth in the dance as seen in these latter tribes. It is social rather than historical, and, while full of spirit, it does not rouse within the dancer or spectator ancestral pride, as it cannot fail to do among the Omahas, where the songs recall the ancient prowess of the people.

It is an interesting fact that to-day, when the Omaha Indians are within the fold of United States citizens, and are exercising all the rights and privileges that belong to that class, — living under precinct and county government, supporting themselves by their own labor, paying their taxes, and battling their way in the line of our own civilization, — that, among the most progressive and industrious of the men, there should have been a revival of the Hae-thu-ska Society, because of a wish to preserve the old historic songs and record of their ancestors. The Leader no longer is chosen because of his skill in aggressive warfare; nor does he paint himself in the old symbolic manner; nor do the members appear in the ancient undress. On the contrary in citizens' or white man's dress, these Omaha farmers meet during the winter evenings in an old earth lodge, their summer's work being done, their barns full, their cattle housed, their chickens gone to roost; and with almost nothing to remind them or the spectator of the days when the people dwelt in tents pitched according to the laws of Hoo-thu-ga, or tribal circle, — when war was a daily expectancy, and food must be gained by the skilled hunter, — these industrious descendants of warriors meet and rehearse the songs and dramatic dances of their forefathers. This revival of the Hae-thu-ska by the better class of Omahas, men of valor in industry and new ideas, shows how truly this society, in its ceremonies and songs, embodies the folk-lore of the Omaha tribe of Indians.

Alice C. Fletcher.